

INSIGHTS: CHILD RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Keeping families together

Making social protection more effective for children

Abstract

Countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) have a tremendously high number of children who grow up in formal care: 1.3 million. Around half of them grow up in large scale residential care institutions which risks harming their health, development and future life chances.

Family separation often happens because parents cannot access the support they need to take care of their children at home. Social protection systems in the region are failing these families. UNICEF urges governments to take immediate action to support these families by improving social protection so that it reaches out to and has an impact on those who need it most, including families at risk of disintegration. Most importantly, governments and societies must work to dismantle the barriers that vulnerable families encounter when trying to access vital services and assistance. This can help to prevent children from being arbitrarily separated from their parents.

Separation of children from families: a litmus test for the effectiveness of social protection

One indicator of the effectiveness of a social protection system is its capacity to support vulnerable families to take care of their children at home. Rates of children living in formal care or separated from their biological families are very high in CEE/CIS.

This suggests that existing social protection systems are failing to give vulnerable families the support they need to prevent the kinds of crises that lead to a child being placed in alternative care.

This edition of *Insights* summarises findings and recommendations of studies on the impact and outreach of social protection systems in Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. These countries all operate social assistance programmes and are in the process of establishing social services. To

understand why high rates of child placement in formal care persist despite this, researchers explored barriers to and impacts of accessing social protection in each country.

The research offers important insight into the weaknesses of and challenges faced by social protection systems in the region. These countries also provide examples of good practice that point to ways in which policy-makers might maximise the impacts of social protection systems.

Social protection needs to address complex social realities

Impoverished families face multiple challenges that combine in ways that make them extremely difficult to overcome. A single mother living in a remote rural village cannot leave her children and travel to town to find work, especially as the strain of caring for her child takes its toll on her physical and mental health. As a lone parent she may lose the support of friends or relatives.

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If she is from a minority group or if her child has a disability, she may suffer further stigma and isolation. Coping with such circumstances drive some to alcoholism or drug addiction, and can lead to destitution and family breakdown.

Addressing the multiple, complex problems of vulnerable families demands well-coordinated, holistic and multi-sector responses; low-level cash benefits are not enough. As one non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker in Kazakhstan commented, families need, “Rehabilitation, psychological and moral support - and targeted social assistance cannot cover this.” To overcome hardships in the long-term, people need to develop their capacity to cope with sudden shock or changes in circumstances, such as the loss of earnings following an unexpected illness, or the burden of looking after a newborn.

In this way, social protection can play a vital role in preventing vulnerability and strengthening resilience to sudden life events or crises, as well as responding to their aftermath. Social protection can empower the vulnerable and contribute to positive social change. For this to happen, the different components of the social protection system (see Box 1) must work together to offer a comprehensive package of support. The social protection package must also have some flexibility in order to respond to the specific individual circumstances that families at risk of disintegration may face.

Social protection in CEE/CIS has traditionally focused on cash transfers for specific groups of people defined by the state as ‘deserving’, for example, pensioners and military veterans. During the Soviet era, social support for vulnerable and poor children was built around networks of residential care institutions; the removal of children from parents struggling to care for them was standard practice. Countries have, therefore, inherited systems that are fragmented, over-reliant on institutional responses and fail to provide individualized support to vulnerable people. Most crucially, they have not been designed to stimulate and

Key Components of Social Protection Systems

Social assistance: social benefits or schemes that aim to alleviate poverty by giving cash or in-kind transfers, tax deductions or fee waivers for basic services.

Social services: family and child support services that can facilitate family life and also prevent neglect and abuse of children and family breakdown. Key services include day-care, counselling, support and advice hotlines, rehabilitation, legal aid and employment of social workers to work with vulnerable people to address issues related to housing, employment, and accessing education and health services. For children at risk, alternative care services such as foster care may be needed.

Programmes to ensure access to services: measures that reduce the financial and social barriers households face when accessing social services, for example, subsidies, health insurance or the abolition of service user fees.

Legislation and policy: reforms that aim to address inequalities in accessing services or economic opportunities. Examples might include employment guarantee schemes or legislation against discrimination.

Source: *Integrated social protection systems: enhancing equity for children*. United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2012.

Box 1

ultimately to help them overcome the difficulties they face. Non-cash based support services to families, which could help build parental capacities and facilitate family life are now

6 When asked why their children were placed into care, many parents said it was because they could not find or access other forms of support.

emerging, but are often neither targeted to the most vulnerable nor widely available within a given country.

Identifying the most vulnerable

The studies found that low-income families, particularly those in remote rural areas or caring for a disabled child, are at highest risk of family separation. Residential care continues to be the main way states attempt to meet the needs of disabled children. Although they only represent 1-5 per cent of the child population, in some countries they constitute over 50 per cent of the residential care population. Young families with newborn babies and infants often struggle to cope with the expense of caring for a baby while losing the earnings of one adult. As a result, large numbers of 0-3 year olds are taken into institutional care across the region. Single mothers and families with a parent dependent on drugs or alcohol are flagged as particularly vulnerable. Other high risk groups include ethnic-minority Roma families in Albania and migrant families with no fixed address in Kazakhstan.

Sometimes the state places a child in institutional care; sometimes parents themselves decide to do so. When asked why their children were placed into care, many parents said it was because they could not find or access other forms of support.

Why families are not getting the support they need

When a social protection system is functioning well, parents struggling to care for their children are able to:

- i) Receive extra cash or other resources through social transfers;
- ii) Access support such as counselling, day-care or advice through social services.

This combination is intended to help families get through tough times without having to take extreme measures such as placing their children in institutions. The governments of

all case study countries have established clear legislative frameworks for developing comprehensive social protection systems (see Box 2). However researchers found that many families living in difficult circumstances are not receiving effective support. They reported that:

- i) Targeted social assistance programmes intended to alleviate poverty are not reaching the majority of needy households. For example, Targeted Social Assistance in Kazakhstan reaches only 3 per cent of the poorest households; in Albania two-thirds of the poor are not covered by the targeted cash-transfer programme called *Ndihma Ekonomike*.
- ii) Non-institution based social services are still being accessed only by a small number of parents and carers. Family and youth social services are being developed and expanded, especially in the Ukraine. However, access and delivery are patchy. Qualitative data collected in all three countries suggest that many parents do neither access services nor understand the purpose of them.

Experience on the ground

Interviews with parents and carers, frontline workers and national decision-makers, build a picture of the barriers vulnerable people face accessing both social assistance and services. They pointed out several important issues:

1. Lack of awareness about eligibility for assistance

Vulnerable families say they do not know what types of social assistance is available for them; they find out they are ineligible for existing schemes because of restrictions built into the design.

- In Albania, land-ownership automatically disqualifies applicants from receiving *Ndihma Ekonomike*. This leaves many needy families that have moved from rural areas, where they may own a small plot of land, to urban settlements, without support.

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- Informal carers in Albania – a very large group that includes extended family – when taking care of the child of a relative, often for extended periods, need to provide for the extra mouths to feed, but cannot access social assistance because they are not formally responsible for the child they care for.
- In Kazakhstan, people who have migrated for work to another part of the country in which they are not officially resident cannot register for Targeted Social Assistance.
- Income calculations for means-tested social transfers sometimes include benefits received through other schemes. For example, a poor family in Kazakhstan that receives a one-off grant for a newborn may no longer be eligible for Targeted Social Assistance.
- In Ukraine calculations for the Guaranteed Minimum Income allowance sometimes take into account disability benefits, guardianship allowances and old age pensions. This means eligible households have to choose between benefits they may be entitled to. The cumulative effect of these different benefits designed to address specific sources of vulnerability might be lost on those families who need it most. As a local level social care expert in Ukraine commented, “Our guardians complain about the system of social benefits especially if they have a child with disability. They really have to choose based on what will be the larger amount – the benefit for the disabled child or social assistance for child deprived of parental care. This is not normal. Complex problems should be addressed in a complex way. They (government) define procedures and eligibility criteria and then it’s your problem if your profile does not match.”

2. Applications for means-tested social assistance are too complicated

In the opinion of a social pedagogue in Kazakhstan, parents must “go through all circles of hell” to access entitlements to

social assistance, spending considerable time and money gathering documents to prove themselves eligible.

According to a frontline worker in Ukraine, “There are so many who cannot gather all the necessary documents and do not know where to go, whom to ask, or what type of application is needed.”

A parent from Kazakhstan added, “Applications for benefits cannot be filed in a village; you have to go to the district centre. I had to spend three days filing an application, because every time some documents were missing, or there were errors in the papers.”

3. Lack of transparency and fairness to access social assistance

Parents and carers expressed confusion about how and to whom social assistance benefits were awarded. They are also frustrated at inconsistencies in monthly allowances and geographical variations in the amounts received.

A parent in Kazakhstan and an NGO worker in Albania commented respectively, “They calculate the amounts in a way unknown to me. They write one thing, while I receive another amount. I cannot understand why” and, “There is a lack of transparency of how the funds are used within financial aid and there is a lack of effective monitoring of the system.”

Some recipients described discrimination by officials administering social assistance programmes. In Kazakhstan parents and carers reported particularly aggressive attitudes, especially towards parents seeking social assistance for disabled children. A frontline worker in Albania spoke about discrimination against Roma families suggesting that “State institutions close the doors to them, or they do not provide the right information.”

4. Social assistance disbursements are

Key Social Protection Policies and Legislation

Albania

The development of social protection policy in Albania is taking place within the context of an on-going process of decentralisation.

- **National Strategy for Integration and Development 2008-2013:** the *Social Protection Sector Strategy* is central to this. Key areas of focus include: improved targeting of cash benefits, decentralisation of social services, clarifying the role of NGOs as service providers and developing community-based services.
- **Social Inclusion Cross Cutting Strategy 2007-2013:** addresses access to services and living conditions of children, people with disabilities (including developing community-based education and services) and minority ethnic groups, most notably the Roma.

Kazakhstan

Key policies and legislation includes:

- **Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Strategic Plan 2011-2015:** aims to increase the coverage of benefits targeted at children and families including an allowance to parents bringing up a child with a disability. Introduced care allowance for guardians.
- **Law on Specialised Services:** the 2008 law aims to increase service provision targeted at families and to develop services in the community, including home-care for children with disabilities.
- **Children of Kazakhstan 2007-2011:** State programme that sought to ensure high-quality educational, health and social services and protection of children in hard-life situations.

Ukraine

In April 2011, the Ministry of Social Policy took over as the lead government agency in the development and implementation of child and family policy. As a result, social policy-making has been in flux.

Key policies and legislation includes:

- **Law of Ukraine ‘On social work with families, children and youth’:** amendments in 2009 broadened the scope of social work, put families at the centre of service provision and introduced the concept of the ‘community social worker’.
- **Concept of Reform of the Social Services System:** this 2007 policy is a clear written strategy of activities to improve the social services system in Ukraine. It has never been fully implemented because of a lack of either action or financing plans.
- **The State Social Services’ Strategy of Social Service Development for Family, Children and Youth in Ukraine 2009-2014:** this aims to “ensure wide access for families, children and youth to high quality social services at community level.”

Box 2

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insufficient to lift people out of long-term poverty

While most parents and carers appreciate receiving assistance, some observed that the amounts were so little that, according to a parent in Albania, “Nothing has changed; we live nowadays, as we lived before, there are still shortages.” In Ukraine respondents felt that, with the exception of the birth grant, most social assistance was too small to make a difference.

5. Parents, staff and decision-makers lack knowledge about social services

Parents who had received community and family-based support from social services noted mainly positive experiences. However the studies found that the majority of the people interviewed for this research are not aware of social services and do not know how to access them.

A mother in Ukraine said, “I have absolutely no clue where I can refer to for support for my disabled child.” A local government worker in Albania claimed, “The mentality here is still very much related to money. People do not understand the different types of social services that would support them. More public awareness of social services is needed.”

6. Availability of social services is variable, delivery inconsistent and capacity of staff poor

All three countries are developing social services, but these are not yet available on any large scale with sustained funding. Respondents reported a lack of specialist social work personnel as frontline workers. “You might find the same person opening the door, doing the secretary role, the Social Administrator role, and a lot of other roles as well” said an NGO worker in Albania.

7. Centre-based social services usually in towns and difficult for vulnerable to reach

There is a tradition of centre-based institutional services with less developed networks of smaller scale community-based services in the three countries. Reaching these may require travel. Travel and overnight stays are expensive and particularly difficult for parents coming from a rural area or caring for a disabled child.

“Lack of wheelchair-accessible public transport is a significant issue preventing people from accessing services,” said a social protection professional in Kazakhstan.

In Albania respondents noted that sometimes husbands do not want their wives to stay overnight outside the home to take the child to service centres.

8. Most people do not trust or know how to use complaints procedures for social services and social assistance

Complaints’ mechanisms can be a good tool for people to claim their rights. Respondents in all countries expressed doubts about the effectiveness of complaints procedures. Comments included:

- “People do not want to complain because it costs money. Besides, I think people do not trust and do not believe in positive consequences of complaints” (a mother, Ukraine);
- “Families can appeal if they do not receive the right amount of benefit, but I have never heard of anyone actually doing it” (a local government worker, Albania);
- “The law is very clear – but often procedures are not as clear” (a national informant, Kazakhstan);
- In Kazakhstan, “Government Online” serves as a complaint mechanism but not everyone has access to the internet. In Ukraine, several cases challenging decisions on social benefits have gone through the courts system, however it is not known which families use the courts. It is possible it is not the poorer families who may need the benefits the most.

“Lack of wheelchair-accessible public transport is a significant issue preventing people from accessing services.”



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Policy issues emerging from current experience

Research about the current situation in Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine has identified the following policy issues:

1. Weak outreach of the available support leads to the low take-up by those who need it most

Social workers and administrators do not systematically and proactively contact, visit and inform vulnerable families of the assistance or services available to them. As a mother in Ukraine said, “If parents know, they will be referred and they will get the benefit. If they don’t know, nobody will inform them.”

This is in contrast to residential schools and care homes which actively recruit children from poor rural areas.

Respondents in Ukraine describe how workers went to remote areas and persuaded parents to place their children or threatened them with removal of their parental rights.

Spotlight on interesting solutions

- **Community outreach in Albania:** Job descriptions for social workers based in Child Protection Units in Albania now require them to go out into the community and identify families at risk.
- **Placing social workers:** in maternity wards in Ukraine and in health facilities and community centres in Albania, and creating the role of ‘Social Pedagogue’ in schools in Kazakhstan has helped identify and make contact with harder-to-reach families who are unlikely to approach services.

2. Excessive administrative barriers results in the vulnerable unable to access assistance

Strict eligibility criteria are intended to prevent

non-eligible households from receiving social assistance. But this also results in a more complex application process which can become an insurmountable barrier for some families, causing the exclusion of a large numbers of eligible families.

The inclusion of other social assistance benefits in calculations to determine a poor family’s income is particularly problematic, especially when different social benefits are meant to address different types of vulnerabilities which might cumulate in the same household.

Spotlight on interesting solutions

- **Reviewing design of targeted social assistance programmes:** in Albania, a major review of the *Ndihma Ekonomike* programme is in the pipeline. This will look at the issue of the exclusion of families who own land. In Kazakhstan, rules that include the value of other social assistance programmes in the calculations to determine a family’s eligibility for Targeted Social Assistance are being reviewed.
- **Moving towards categorical benefits:** Both Kazakhstan and Ukraine have a broad range of categorical benefits, including one-off grants for newborns and infants, cash transfers for single parent families childcare assistance for children below three (Ukraine), and assistance for families with more than four children (Kazakhstan). Together with disability benefits, these categorical social benefits are reaching higher numbers of the poorest families than means-tested schemes in all three countries. This high coverage is because administrative barriers to accessing these categorical grants are lower and the amounts distributed are higher. Ukraine in particular has been phasing out spending on means-tested benefits in favour of categorical benefits to support children and carers.

‘ Social workers in health facilities and social pedagogues in schools have made contact with harder-to-reach families. ’



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3. Social protection system components need to be integrated and coordinated

Lack of integration of support mechanisms hampers the effectiveness of the system. “Interagency working between sectors is the biggest problem. Everyone is working on their own....there is little sharing of information; at local level sectors don’t come together naturally; the Child Protection Units try to play a coordinating role but this is based on personal relationships rather than institutional responsibility,” said a frontline worker in Albania.

An NGO worker in Ukraine said, “No Ministry considers itself responsible for supporting families and children as a whole.” Each department focuses on their own specific concern. Frontline workers pointed out that while the Ministries concerned with social protection in Ukraine work to develop community-based social services and prevent children being separated from their parents, the Ministry of Education, Science, Youth and Sports has been calling on local governments to organise the education of children in institutions and actively recruit children from villages to meet education targets.

At the local level, social assistance offices and social services often do not communicate, even when operating from the same building.

As a nation decision-maker in Kazakhstan noted, “The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is trying to merge services and the benefits system but it’s not really working – at local level they are completely separate – the local benefits office is standalone.... the service area is new and underdeveloped.”

Spotlight on interesting solutions

- **Coordinate policy-making:** in April 2011, overall coordination for social protection was brought to Ukraine’s Ministry of Social Policy to enable better coordination at the top.

- **Joint efforts of medical staff and social workers:** in Ukraine, and more recently Kazakhstan, social workers have been placed in maternity wards to work with pregnant women whose children are at high risk of being placed in institutional care. These workers are able to access hard-to-reach woman living in difficult circumstances and offer a range of interventions and advice. In Ukraine, the joint efforts of medical staff are linked by some research respondents to the marked decrease in infants being placed in institutional care. For a local government expert in Ukraine, “It is a positive development that we have more mother and baby units, more social workers working in maternity wards and clinics. As a result we have less abandonment – the number dropped 5 times – from 2,500 cases per year to 800 cases last year.”

4. More guidance needed for local respondents to plan, finance and implement services

The need for better planning and clear guidelines for implementation was repeatedly raised by respondents in all three case study countries. Respondents felt that the absence of such guidelines had led to many of the barriers and inconsistencies experienced on the ground. Many complained that strategies are not properly planned and do not have adequate financing to become reality.

“Central government write the laws but do not provide guidelines for local government on how to implement them,” as a local government worker in Albania said. A national level expert in Kazakhstan commented, “The new state social services law is not yet fully operational – clarification is needed on the role of social work at management and practice levels – where they should sit, what is the role of NGOs and how to involve them.”

Secondary legislation also needs to be developed, especially concerning: eligibility

‘No Ministry considers itself responsible for supporting families and children as a whole.’



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criteria for social assistance programmes; roles, mandates and responsibilities within social services; roles and mandates of NGOs and their relationship with state structures; funding streams and mechanisms for services; complaints procedures; standards for services and codes of conduct for professionals.

Spotlight on good practice

- Developing protocols for collaborative working: in Albania, Child Protection Units have been set up with the contribution of donors and implemented by NGOs in collaboration with local authorities. To support this collaboration, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities developed, with the support of Terre des Hommes and UNICEF, the comprehensive *Working Protocol for Child Protection Workers*. This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of child protection workers and detailed case management guidelines. It includes the recommendation that every case is reviewed at regular intervals of three months or more frequently should a child's situation deteriorate or improve. Multidisciplinary teams have also been established to protect, assess and refer children at risk and CPUs are expected to act as coordination points for linking families into social support offices. Although the study could not assess how well the protocol was being implemented, it provides clear instructions and guidance for workers involved in assessing and working with families.

5. More work needed to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies

Having moved from a system of centralized planning and management of public services, government workers are not always properly equipped with skills and tools for programmes and budgets. Evaluation of the impact, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability of public

policies, in order to review and refine policy and budget decisions, is also not yet a strong and recognized function of the system.

A key informant from an Albanian NGO commented, "Decision-makers don't have serious discussions about developing realistic plans – if they sit down to discuss something ... they don't go into detail about how we can reach this goal...this is in general our way of working and thinking from the past ...so they don't think seriously how to formulate a strategy - this leads to weak action planning, collaboration and strategies which are impossible to deliver."

6. More better-trained and better-paid social workers

Poor working conditions mean that even in the Ukraine, where 1,350 graduate annually, social workers are not necessarily taking up relevant posts. Interviewees suggested that social work training does not always prepare students adequately for the realities of the job. Many struggle to work effectively with marginalised and stigmatized groups.

Tools that social workers need to do their job effectively, such as emergency social assistance or access to housing to respond to family crisis, have not yet been well established. Training social workers and specialised personnel to work with, for example, children with special needs also needs to be established as a priority.

Spotlight on interesting solutions

- **Training social workers:** in Kazakhstan, increasing the number of social workers is a major priority and KZT 6 million (around USD 39,300) have been allotted to training 300 new social workers. Ukraine is leading the way developing its social work force, with 1,350 social workers graduating every year.
- **Involving people from minority groups in recruitment and service delivery:** one

More social workers are in maternity wards and clinics.
As a result, there is less child abandonment.



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NGO in Albania has had success using 'mediators' from within the Roma community to help that group access social services and social assistance.

7. Financing plans must aim to ensure equal provision across regions

Arrangements for financing social protection measures – in particular the flow of funds from central to local level – are often inadequate.

In Albania nine residential care institutions are given funds by central government, but additional resources for community-based services need to be raised by local governments which already have constrained budgets, especially in the poorest and remotest areas. Child Protection Units are all funded by NGOs and international donors, raising questions about sustainability.

A key NGO informant commented, "I can't say that the state hasn't done anything – policies have been developed! But policy-makers need to get out into the communities and understand real needs more. Now the government has a strategy [for Roma]...but no financing is attached. The strategy is very thorough but it needs an action plan and budget and to have short, mid and long terms goals."

Researchers in Ukraine found that the system of allocating financial resources per head for people taken into institutional care creates disincentives for local authorities and state service providers to invest in alternative social protection.

8. Funding and unchallenged public perceptions still favour institutional care

"A lot of officials somewhere deep in their heart still sincerely believe that an institution is better for a child and they motivate parents for this", noted a national-level government expert in Ukraine.

Large, well-organised networks of residential

care institutions continue to receive funding and actively recruit children from poor, rural families: institutional care is 'usual practice' for provision of healthcare and education to children with disabilities or from poor families. Parents tend not to challenge the advice of education and health professionals and may even consider it a positive step for their child.

One child rights expert policy-maker in Ukraine commented that there was no requirement and little incentive to work proactively with families, "Personally I think in most cases it is easier to work with the child in some type of institution than to work with complex problems of families. And it is not required by the legislation to preserve the family – it is only required to protect the child and an official can always say that taking away the child was a protective measure. Probably the state should more strictly require work with families."

Recommendations

The findings from the research in Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine provide lessons relevant to many of the countries in the CEE/CIS region. There are seven general recommendations emerging from this research, with broad application across the region.

1. Maximise impacts by integrating social protection efforts

Better impact can be achieved at low cost by better coordinating and integrating existing social protection interventions. In practice this means:

- Ensuring that different sectoral policies, other than defining specific sectoral goals, jointly contribute to ensure larger public policy goals. Databases containing information on service users and beneficiaries need to be coordinated, and sharing of information facilitated, with due consideration to the protection of privacy.
- Using the existing infrastructure and reach of social assistance, health and education

structures to extend the reach of social services. Grants for the newborn, for example, offer unprecedented opportunities to communicate with young families about other kinds of services. Similarly, medical professionals who come into contact with vulnerable families who are seeking medical advice related to pregnancy or child birth could facilitate referral to other social services if there is an imminent risk of disintegration of the family.

- Improving information sharing to the public on available benefits and services. Social workers in particular need to be equipped to inform clients of the benefits available to them, and social assistance officers should know about the kinds of services that might benefit their recipients.
- Developing protocols and training that enable social workers, administrators of social benefits and others who come in regular contact with vulnerable families (police, staff in schools, health workers) to work together.

2. Maximise impacts by developing guidance on how to implement and enforce existing legislation

Legislation has been improved but practice in the field is lagging. Improvements in delivery of programmes at the local level can be achieved in practice by:

- Setting out clear mandates, roles and responsibilities for social workers and develop clear guidance on eligibility requirements and application processes for social assistance.
- Clarifying procedures for how to make claims and complaints through legal mechanisms and, as part of this, establishing ways of enforcing legislation that prohibits discrimination at local level.
- Establishing clear and stable funding streams and mechanisms for programmes and services.

3. Extend reach of social assistance

schemes by reviewing eligibility criteria and application processes for means-tested social assistance

Different forms of social assistance exist in the region, but outreach is vital to eliminate risks such as family separation. Ensuring better reach and addressing some barriers parents and carers face when accessing social assistance means in practice:

- Providing clear, publicly available guidance on application procedures, eligibility criteria and benefit entitlements.
- Ensuring that applicants are assessed 'net' of other benefits that they are entitled to so that they do not have to choose between different benefits in case where they have multiple vulnerabilities.
- Minimising travel for registration and offering support for acquiring documents.
- Raising the value of benefits for means tested assistance so that they represent a higher share of average household income is also likely to increase the coverage and longer-term impacts of these programmes.

4. Extend reach of social protection through awareness-raising and pro-active search and support to vulnerable families

Extending the reach of social protection in practice means identifying who are the most vulnerable groups, defining the entry points for how to reach out to them and proactively help to eliminate the barriers they may face to get assistance. For example:

- Targeting mothers in hospitals has had significant and rapid impacts in Ukraine.
- Families with children from rural areas, families with children with a disability, families living in extreme poverty, and families where drug and alcohol problems and mental health issues are prevalent, should be proactively targeted. The introduction of a carer's allowance in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and elsewhere, and proactive day care services such as those introduced in Albania, have had some success in supporting disabled

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children within the family context.

- Particular attention should be focused on families with young children. Interventions targeting single parent households and families with large numbers of children should also be prioritized. Community and home visits, and media and radio publicity might be ways of reaching these families.

5. Strengthen equity in provision of social protection

Social protection is meant to help overcome inequities, build resilience and empower people so that they can face risk better and not fall through the cracks.

As such, social protection should not perpetuate the inequities in societies that it is meant to fight. In practice this means:

- Ensuring that there is a nationally agreed minimum package of social protection services and social assistance for all who need it, regardless of where they live in the country and what vulnerabilities they face.
- Providing a predictable and sustainable funding for such social protection from central level funds.
- Delivering social services and social assistance in ways that are empowering, respectful of rights and help overcome discriminatory attitudes which may exist in societies at large.

6. Continued drive for non-institutional care solutions

Non-institutional care solutions still need to be promoted at all levels. In practice:

- Awareness campaigns about the

benefits of keeping children in parental care and about alternative kinds of social services can help.

- A continued and parallel closure of care institutions will also contribute to shift the demand for support.

7. Ensure evidence-based policy-making by developing effective monitoring and evaluation systems

An effective and efficient social protection system is one that is continuously improved, can identify its own errors and unintended side-effects. Therefore, to ensure the best possible effects of policies in exchange for the public resources invested, there is a need for effective monitoring and evaluation. To put these in place in practice means:

- Increasing the availability of information on the take up and impacts of social assistance and services among different groups of beneficiaries.
- Establishing mechanisms that allow the views of users to reach service providers and planners, and that enable them to make complaints and challenge decisions. This can be part of a comprehensive data and monitoring system bringing together different public services that with deal child and family well-being.

Credits

Insights Issue 1/2012 on Social Protection was written by [Peroline Ainsworth](#) and edited by [Elena Gaia](#) and [Anna Nordenmark Severinsson](#). The Design is by [Yudi Rusdia](#). To download this issue, please go to www.unicef.org/ceecis/Insights2012_on_Social_Protection

This issue is based on a study that was carried out in three countries in 2011, called *The capacity of social protection systems to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable children and their families and prevent family separation - a thematic study covering Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine*. The study was coordinated by Oxford Policy Management under the supervision of Jean Claude Legrand, UNICEF. To download this study, please go to www.unicef.org/ceecis/2011_Thematic_Study_on_Social_Protection.

The first edition of the *Insights series of analysis* was published by the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. *Insights* provide a focused analysis on a specific aspect of child rights in the region.

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